

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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R 161412Z MAY 75

FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3460

INFO AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 1800

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PINS, PINR, MILI, SY

SUBJECT: AS-SAYYAD REPORT ON RIF'AT AL-ASAD

REF: BEIRUT 6168

1. AFTER RECEIVING BEIRUT'S TIMELY CABLE WE CHECKED WITH SOURCE WHO HAS RELATIVE IN RIF'AT'S REPUBLICAN GUARD AND WHOM WE CONSIDER RELIABLE. HE ASSURED US THAT REPORT WAS "DEFINITELY INACCURATE." HE ADDED THAT TWO WEEKS AGO RIF'AT FETED MEMBERS OF HIS OFFICER CORPS AT A DAMASCUS CLUB AND SPECIFICALLY TOLD THEM THAT HE WOULD NEVER RELINQUISH HIS POSITION AS COMMANDER OF THE REPUBLICAN GUARD REGARDLESS OF WHAT POSITION HE OFFERED WITHIN SARG.

2. FROM OTHER SOURCES AND FROM OUR AWARENESS OF SYRIAN MEDIA REPORTING ON RIF'AT, WE UNDERSTAND THAT HE HAS BEEN ASSIGNED TO EDUCATIONAL BUREAU SLOT ON PARTY REGIONAL COMMAND. DURING LAST TWO WEEKS HE HAS RECEIVED PROMINENT MEDIA ATTENTION ON TWO OCCASIONS WHEN HE SPOKE PUBLICLY, TOH TIMES OF WHICH WERE TO AUDIENCES COMPOSED OF MEMBERS OF EDUCATIONAL FIELD.

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3. ALTHOUGH WE HAVE HEARD RUMORS OF DISPUTE BETWEEN

RIF'AT AND HIS BROTHER PRESIDENT ASAD, BOTTOM LINE OF ALL RUMORS WAS THAT RIF'AT HAD CONSISTENTLY REFUSED BROTHER'S OVERTURES TO LEAVE GUARD AND WAS BACKED OVERWHELMINGLY BY HIS TROOPS. RECENTLY RIF'AT HAS ALSO BEEN ENGAGED IN ATTEMPT TO EXPAND HIS POWER BASE BEYOND MILITARY CONFINES INTO STUDENT-INTELLECTUAL RANKS, AN IMPORTANT SOURCE OF TRADITIONAL BAATHI POWER. BUT THERE IS NO INDICATION THAT HE IS DOING THIS AT THE EXPENSE OF HIS MILITARY COMMAND. IT SEEMS TO US UNLIKELY THAT HE WOULD SEPARATE HIMSELF FROM THE REPUBLICAN GUARD, EVEN IF ORDERED TO DO SO BY THE PARTY COMMAND.

4. ON CONTRARY, WE HEARD RECENTLY FROM WESTERN EMBASSY SOURCE THAT PRESIDENT ASAD HAD CREATED A NEW SECURITY SERVICE, UNDER COMMAND OF RIF'AT, WITH SOLE OBJECTIVE OF IMPROVING SURVEILLANCE OF ALAWITE COMMUNITY. PRESIDENT REPORTEDLY HAD TO EXPEND GREAT EFFORTS TO KEEP ALAWITES UNIFIED IN SUPPORT OF HIS LEADERSHIP AT REGIONAL CONGRESS, INCLUDING PLACING ADDITIONAL ALAWITES ON REGIONAL COMMAND, AND HE WANTS TO ASSURE IT DOES NOT HAPPEN AGAIN.

5. SOURCE PARA 1 ABOVE STATED THAT MAJOR ADNAN MAKHLOUF WAS REPUBLICAN GUARD CHIEF OF STAFF AND THAT HE IS BROTHER OF MRS. HAFEZ AL-ASAD AND ALSO BROTHER OF MUHAMMAD A. MAKHLOUF WHO IS DIRECTOR OF SYRIAN TOBACCO MONOPLOY.
MURPHY

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